



# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL



# ACCOUNTABLE NOW

## INTERIM REPORT 2019

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First published in 2017

by Amnesty International Ltd

Peter Benenson House, 1 Easton Street

London WC1X 0DW, UK

Index: **AFR 44/1657/2017**

Original language: English

**amnesty.org**



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**AMNESTY**  
INTERNATIONAL 

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# STATEMENT BY JULIE VERHAAR, ACTING SECRETARY GENERAL

## 1. Strategic Commitment to Accountability

In response to Amnesty International's [2018 Accountable Now Report](#), an Independent Panel assessed to what extent areas in our report were addressed or not and provided [feedback](#). Based on this, a call was organised between Amnesty International staff and the Independent Panel to verbally address some of the areas that had been flagged. Based on the [Minutes](#) of this discussion, we agreed to respond to certain points before writing this interim report, which can be found in the [response letter](#). One of the key points that was agreed on is that this interim report, the 2019 interim report, would focus on 'internal changes to culture, wellbeing, and ways of working' as well as the significant listening exercise we have engaged in due to the design of Amnesty International's next global strategy.

I must commence by acknowledging that Kumi Naidoo has stepped down as Secretary General since December 5, 2019 due to [medical reasons](#). In his departure, I will be Acting Secretary General to guide Amnesty International through the transition of recruiting a new Secretary General in order to ensure that the organisation can continue to contribute to the struggle for justice in the future. As Acting Secretary General, accountability remains a key priority and I would like to share that we have indeed made some great progress since our last report. The organisation has been through a sensitive time and we have tried to be very open about the challenges we faced over the past few years. In this respect, the report elaborates on three key points: the organisational changes recently undergone at the International Secretariat, the plans we are implementing to address culture, wellbeing and ways of working, and lastly, one of the main things we are doing around accountability, is the extensive listening exercise we have engaged in with partners, rights holders and the public to develop Amnesty International's next global strategy.

I would like to emphasise that Amnesty International is a democratic movement that strongly believes in the strength of openly sharing and creating collectively to seek social justice on some of the very pressing human rights challenges we face today. Just as Kumi has done, I will continue to listen to as many voices both inside and outside of Amnesty International to try and understand how prepared we are as a movement to confront these very serious challenges posed by the world around us.

Firstly, a challenge we have been facing over the past year has been the restructure of the International Secretariat due to a budget gap. After an internal consultation, the restructure led to a reduction of 110 roles of which 22 were compulsory redundancies, 49 voluntary redundancies (of which 19 where the role was not disestablished), and 58 remaining posts reduced being already existing vacancies. Further detail into this process has been shared below and we continue to be transparent and accountable for the changes that were necessary and that inevitably have affected our staff and our contribution to our human rights work.

Secondly, I'd like to highlight the development and implementation of our Employee Experience Programme. We have developed a comprehensive plan that is outlined in this report to embed culture and wellbeing change systematically and sustainably. It also addresses and responds to the recommendations of the external reviews. As a result of the internal challenges over the past years, it was key that we rebuild trust by mainstreaming ways of working with an emphasis on individual and collective wellbeing.

Lastly, the past year has been a key year to also listen to our stakeholders, both within and external to the Amnesty International movement. This year has been important as we have been designing Amnesty International's new global strategy. As this strategy will be guiding the whole organisation from 2021 onwards, we wanted to ensure that we would base this from the input of our Amnesty International members, activists, staff, volunteers, partners, global donors, stakeholders, and the general public. The aim is to understand how Amnesty International should transform itself to become a more effective organisation, and one that is more accountable to those on whose behalf we work. This has been quite a journey and continues to be so as we get closer to having a draft strategy to share back with the whole Amnesty International movement and partners in February and a final strategy adopted by our movement's Global Assembly in July. This process has been a unique opportunity to come together as one movement with a positive and forward-looking outlook – including asking ourselves what type of organisational do we want to be and what kind of culture and values we want all of our work to be underpinned by.

What we have learned from this process already is how invaluable it is to open ourselves up to receive input from those *outside* of our movement - as we do not have all the answers and have a lot to learn particularly from grassroots people-powered movements. As was mentioned in our 2018 report, this is not a time for working in silos and it is our ethical commitment, and wholehearted belief as a global movement, that we need to 'walk the talk' as a leading human rights INGO. And as a result, we must always strive to improve our legitimacy and relevance in dialogue with the broader social justice ecosystem. The adoption of our new strategy in 2020 will be another milestone to strengthen our accountability vis-a'-vis our members, supporters, partners, rights holders and members of the public.

Julie Verhaar

*Acting Secretary General of Amnesty International*

# INTERNAL CHANGES TO CULTURE, WELLBEING & WAYS OF WORKING

As suggested by the Accountable Now Independent Review Panel in 2018, we particularly welcomed the Panel's suggestion that Amnesty International focus its interim report on internal changes to culture, wellbeing and ways of working. In our response to the Independent Review Panel on 11 March 2019, we stated that we are working on a comprehensive plan to help us stabilise and start to address the challenges that we have faced over the past few years. This has been addressed in the Employee Experience Programme outlined below. But to understand this, we also want to share a bit more about the internal restructure and consultation process occurring at the International Secretariat (IS) to understand the context.

## CONSULTATION PROCESS & IS RESTRUCTURE

In 2019 we faced several internal challenges we needed to address to allow us to work towards a new vision for the IS and Amnesty International as a movement. The three main blocks that we need to get in place are; to define our purpose, shape our vision, and clarify our organisational model. The organisational changes we've had were influenced by:

- A transition of IS leadership to a new structure – including a new Coalition Leadership Team (CLT)
- Addressing the financial situation in the IS, implementing a Financial Recovery Plan which included different cost savings measures in our activity budget as well as reducing the number of posts and using voluntary and compulsory redundancy measures as part of a formal consultation process.
- Responding to concerns about the present culture which are outlined in the KonTerra and Laddie reports (see section on EEP)
- Defining and agreeing the next global strategy for our movement (see section on the #NextStrategy).

In 2019, Amnesty International IS was faced with having to meet current financial deficits and putting measures in place to handle projected future costs and reserves levels. To deal with this, a Financial Recovery Plan was set which included a reduction of 110 roles of which 22 were compulsory redundancies, 49 voluntary redundancies (of which 19 where the role was not disestablished), and 58 remaining posts reduced being already existing vacancies. As part of this process, to reduce the impact on the number of posts reduced, staff - through the union - agreed to a freeze on Amnesty International's Cost of Living Allowance in 2019 and a increment freeze for a period of 12 months from October 2019. A three-month Consultation period was held from June - September 2019 following the phased timeline below. During the Consultation period various support was provided to staff such as: employee support packs, wellbeing support packs, manager support packs, manager briefings, and training with an external expert on Handling Difficult Conversations. Emotional and psychological support was provided during the process which included 121 counselling sessions provided through a range of techniques (including CBT and trauma focused therapy), action learning sets and stress and resilience workshops. To support colleagues with the transition into new employment / other career opportunities, outplacement support was also provided which included coaching, support with CV writing and job hunting. This process has resulted in a new organisational structure that was implemented with effect from 9<sup>th</sup> September 2019.

## EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE PROGRAMME (EEP)

As a result of the tragic deaths by suicide of two of our colleagues in 2018, three independent reviews were undertaken, two by The KonTerra Group and one by James Laddie QC. The Employee Experience Programme sets out how we are responding to the recommendations made as part of these reports, complemented by other internal reviews and staff surveys over the past two years, and considering the many conversations across the International Secretariat about the changes and improvements we will be introducing throughout 2019/20.

Kumi Naidoo, now former Secretary General of Amnesty International, set our employee experience journey to transform Amnesty International into a healthier, kinder and more trusting working environment. *"We all want to experience a compassionate and inclusive workplace where diversity, equality and fairness thrives. Our new Employee Experience Programme sets out concrete*

*actions and measures in four distinct, and closely related core areas: Repair, Develop, Strengthen & Reform (see image above)."* A Programme Board has been established to provide governance and accountability of the delivery of the EEP. The Board was chaired by Kumi Naidoo up until his departure and that role has now been taken up by Julie Verhaar, Acting Secretary General. The board holds decision-making authority and includes responsibility for things like:

- Defining and ensuring delivery of our success measures
- Signing off the implementation plan
- Championing participation at all levels

The Programme Board consists of members including representatives of the Coalition Leadership Team, International Board, wider Movement, Staff and Managers Union members, IS Regional Offices, Employee Experience Plan project managers and People and Organisational Development colleagues. The Board first met in July and met again in October to start initial discussions on the ongoing role of the board, measuring success, involvement, engagement and communication.

In 2019, we have achieved the following as part of the EEP:

- **Outsourcing the investigation process** - We have temporarily outsourced the investigation process, to a company called Fitzgerald HR, relating to complaints raised from staff under the grievance, bullying and harassment, whistleblowing or disciplinary policies. The intention is to identify and address difficulties which unless resolved, would stand in the way of building a healthier, safer and more supportive working environment. We will undertake a review of the impact of outsourcing the process at the end of 2019, although it is expected that the investigation process will remain outsourced throughout 2020.
- **Leadership Review** - We have been implementing the structural changes informed by the Leadership Review (a review conducted by Deloitte on Kumi's behalf), including introducing a new Coalition Leadership Team and forming a second tier Leadership Group made up of all Regional and Programme Directors.
- **Testing and developing healing approaches** that provide spaces for people to name and process their workplace experiences (both positive and negative) and complexity they face in their work, guided by experts in this space. An external consultant psychologist (Barbara Wren) has been used to provide individual counselling and group work to explore relationships at work, hopes and fears for the future, and resilience management.
- **Reinforcing processes and policies** for a zero-tolerance approach to discrimination and harassment. Amnesty International have drafted a Code of Conduct which is currently under review and will be submitted to the Coalition Leadership Team in Quarter 1 2020 for approval.
- **Implementing Safeguarding Policy** - The Coalition Leadership Team approved the full review of Amnesty International's Safeguarding Policy with approval of the new policy planned for Quarter 1 2020.
- **Union representatives in key management meetings** - Union representatives have been included in the Employee Experience Programme Board and are being consulted on a regular basis through the JNCC mechanisms.



- **Continuing to provide support for employees** experiencing stress and anxiety through Amnesty International's Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) provided externally by CiC. 32% of Amnesty International's employees have used one of the EAP services. The most frequently reported work-related issues have been: pressure from employment termination and relationships. Amnesty International is very much in line with other charities and organisations regarding the effect working at Amnesty International has on employee well-being. During 2019, the EAP has been supplemented by Barbara Wren (see above) supporting people through change during the consultation process. Ongoing support is also provided by external consultant Fiona Dunkley who helps support people who need recovering from traumatic events (e.g. viewing traumatic material or experiencing traumatic events) while working at Amnesty International.
- **Establishing a Wellbeing Advisors Network** of employees who will also be trained in psychological first aid. 15 Wellbeing Advisors (Mental Health First Aiders) have been trained at the IS's London office and merged with Amnesty International's existing peer-to-peer support network. Further mental Health First Aid training is being provided for regional offices.
- **Running an audit to identify employees who may need additional support** who have unsupervised or supervised access to children and vulnerable adults as part of your work with Amnesty International or at risk of psychological and physical harm from threats, trauma or suffering in others and/or have been exposed to threatening communications whilst at Amnesty International.
- **Deliver training to build management and leadership capability** - E-learning modules have been delivered on Accountability, Feedback, Alignment, Psychological Safety, and Leading Teams. These are supported by Webinars where managers can discuss applying the learning to their teams. Webinars to raise awareness of Action Learning (AL) will be delivered in 2020 followed by train-the-trainer sessions.
- **Employee Experience Framework** - A framework has been established to integrate different sources of evidence on current issues Amnesty International faces related to wellbeing and performance. The framework will be used to measure current levels of wellbeing and performance and choose and target interventions.
- **Employee Management Process** is currently being reviewed and a new holistic approach will be taken to performance management including psychosocial elements of performance in addition to the more traditional goal-setting and alignment elements. This process will be delivered by Q1 2020.

## LISTENING TO STAKEHOLDERS

The Independent Review Panel requested that we also provide information on how Amnesty International listens to internal and external stakeholders. 2019 has been quite a fundamental year due to the design of Amnesty International's next global strategy, which has been dedicated to extensive discussions with stakeholders at various moments. Additionally, progress has also been made in terms of feedback and external verification from partners and other stakeholders we work with.

### #NEXTSTRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

Across our movement, we are facing an essential question: how do we, as Amnesty International, continue to achieve impact and remain relevant in an ever-changing world? This is one of the guiding questions in the process of developing Amnesty International's next global strategy. The design of the strategy was split into four phases (see diagram below) and one of key guiding principles for the design process was **learning from others**. In all phases, an element of listening to both internal and external stakeholders was included, and these are:



- **Creating a public #NextStrategy website** - This page is a public-facing depository to engage and listen to stakeholders, with over 39,000 views. To be accessible to a diverse range of stakeholders, most pages are available in English, French, Spanish, and Arabic. This also includes various [blogs](#) that have been written from people both internal and external to the Amnesty International movement to share as think pieces with the broader public.

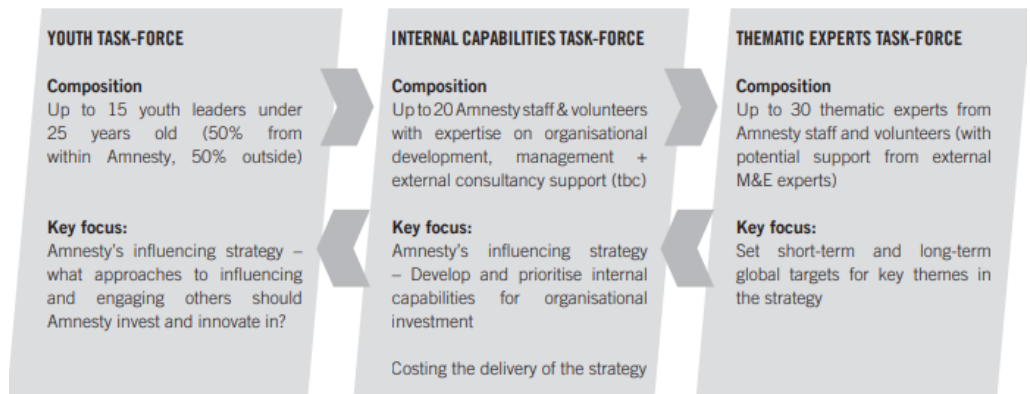
- **Getting the opinion of the general public by using a civic participation tool** - a global public survey was conducted to get viewpoints from our membership. However, this was more than just a survey as we used [PoLis](#), an innovative online tool to gather open-ended feedback by combining aspects of a traditional survey, comment board, and voting system into one application. It allowed for users to submit their own opinions as well as vote on other people's statements. To reach a diverse range of respondents, the survey page was translated into English, French, Spanish, Arabic, Simplified Chinese, and Urdu. **2,881** people participated and voted **76,530** times. The results were then posted publicly and shared with the movement ([PoLis Report](#) - or see the [blog](#) written about this).

- **Four open global events** were initiated to invite partners, targets, critics, and emerging movements to weigh in on our future. A compilation of all the videos can be found here: [Global events](#). The events were on topics such as *Shifting Narratives & Attitudes*, *Diversity & Partnerships*, and *Influencing & Disrupting Power*. There was diversity in terms of regions (Americas, Europe, Africa and online - to cater to MENA & Asia Pacific audiences) but also in terms of language as one of the events was fully in Spanish and another was interpreted into English, French, Spanish, and Arabic.

- **Listening exercises** were carried out by individual Amnesty International programmes, regional offices, entities, and networks to source ideas and solutions. This fed into a global listening exercise where all actors could officially submit their input. The input phase generated a total of **163** written submissions: 53 from national entities, 26 from IS offices and programmes (including regional offices), 11 from Amnesty International global networks, and 74 from external partners/organisations (such as funders, NGOs, UN offices, etc.). All this input contributed to developing a synthesis report that distilled the key trends and solutions.

- **Task Forces** to prototype various elements of the strategy are also being engaged as part of the design, another element of listening to stakeholders. There are three different task forces:

#### THE TASK FORCES – COMPOSITION, TIMELINE AND RECRUITMENT PROCESS



- **Internal communication** to national entities as well as the IS has happened on a regular basis via email and our intranet to inform staff and volunteers but also create a dialogue.

Over the past year, these different things have been fundamental in shaping how Amnesty International listens to internal and external stakeholders.

#### ONGOING FEEDBACK

In 2019, we continued to strengthen our work with partners – in the way we receive feedback on our work and how we can validate our own assessment of impact.

- **Impact & Learning Review** - as part of the [global impact review of 2018](#), approaching external partners was introduced and promoted. This was done for purposes of feedback but also triangulating the data we collect on the human rights impact we achieve



globally. 18% of IS projects indicated that they conducted their annual reviews with input from external partners. The same information was not collected about national entities. While this is a low percentage of IS projects, we are making positive steps towards improving our collaboration with partners when tracking our impact. We also reached out to over 180 stakeholders who were asked to provide their views on the role of Amnesty International in achieving human rights impact over the past year. This included NGOs, researchers, activists, and others who are familiar with the work of Amnesty International. 21.5% of all the stakeholders approached filled in a questionnaire allowing us to cross-check, verify, and enrich our impact analysis. In-depth interviews were also conducted with some of the major global funders Amnesty International works with and a set of recommendations was defined based on this to feed into the Impact & Learning Review and development of our new strategy.

- **External verification pilots** - as a follow-up to the external feedback we sought as part of the Impact & Learning Review mentioned above, we also conducted external verification pilots to test various tools and methods. This has been done with four projects spread over four regions on various topics from LGBTI+ rights to death penalty with different external actors, such as activists, partner NGOs, and government representatives. An overview of guidelines is being prepared and shared with the Movement based on these experiences.
- **Internal awareness on importance of feedback & complaints** - besides just improving feedback and external verification from partners, we also wanted to help raise awareness internally on the importance of feedback and complaints mechanisms to our work. We also aimed to build knowledge resources on how to handle and receive external complaints since at least half of all national entities identified that they would benefit from some support in this area. To improve this we: a) worked with human resources; b) involved the global youth team in terms of safeguarding, feedback and complaints mechanisms; c) shared Accountable Now and other external resources with national entities relevant to this issue through our Impact & Learning Network (consisting of both IS and national entity staff); d) developed a Frequently Asked Questions document based on our analysis of reporting on feedback and complaints by national entities. This resource was shared within the Impact & Learning Network but also on our staff intranet. Finally, we have also been working on revising our internal Accountability Framework to incorporate feedback and complaints as a key component.